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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/RUSSIA: MINISTER TIMMERMANS REGRETS
RUSSIA DEALS

REF: THE HAGUE 1979

Classified By: Ambassador Roland Arnall for reasons 1.5(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On November 9, Ambassador met with Dutch MFA Minister for European Affairs Timmermans to discuss Russia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, French President Sarkozy, Timmermans, upcoming trips to the United States, and plans to commemorate 400 years of American-Dutch relations. Although Timmermans officially defended the reasons for recent Dutch-Russian energy deals, he privately confessed disappointment. He also expressed strong doubt the EU could ever reach consensus on Kosovo. Timmermans is visiting New York November 16-18, and will also visit Washington DC November 26-28; he is seeking high level meetings at State, DOE, NSC, and Capitol Hill (see para 8). END SUMMARY.

Dutch - Russian Relations

12. (C) Timmermans stated he was not without concerns about the latest Dutch-Russian business agreements. However, he must defend the government's policy. (Note: Timmermans served previously as a diplomat in Moscow and is known to advocate a stronger human rights policy toward Russia. On November 8, Timmermans' fellow MP and Labor Party member Martijn van Dam criticized PM Balkenende's purported failure to publicly discuss human rights during the PM's recent visit to Russia.) Timmermans noted that the positive news is that engaging Russia is the only way to influence it. There isn't a level playing field for energy deals, and the Dutch energy sector needs the deals with Russia. If the Russians don't make deals and follow through to develop their energy sector, they will default on their contracts, and the fallout will hit Germany and then the Netherlands. Timmermans concluded that he has great concerns...but Russia is not going away.

Kosovo

13. (C) Timmermans noted that Russia was creating havoc in the Balkans, and Kosovo will be a messy affair. The Russians will react strongly (to a Kosovar declaration of independence), and the European reaction will be all over the place, I'm afraid. Timmermans was concerned about the future implications of the EU's outreach to Kosovo: Kosovo is run by people who live off crime...(they have) no other means to support themselves.

Afghanistan

14. (C) Timmermans had just returned from the Dutch cabinet

meeting, where Afghanistan was discussed only on the margins. In principle, the first round of cabinet discussions will take place November 16, and everyone wants to avoid delay that could mean a January, rather than December, parliamentary decision (reftel). For Timmermans, setting an 18-24 month time limit on the Uruzgan deployment is key -- the deadline should be firm to avoid repeating the Dutch debate in two years. (Note: Timmermans' statement reflects the view of the Labor Party. Timmermans added that his brother will soon go to Afghanistan as a battalion commander, and that he thinks about the parents of the dead soldiers in Afghanistan.) The Dutch will not disengage from Afghanistan any time soon, but will disengage from Uruzgan. The French decision to deploy in Uruzgan is very good news, though there was an explicit deal between PM Balkenende and President Sarkozy -- that the Dutch would deploy to Chad in exchange for the French deployment to Afghanistan.

Sarkozy

15. (C) President Sarkozy is creating a wonderful opportunity for the EU and the United States. However, the risk is that he may overpromise and underdeliver in France and within the EU. Sarkozy's steps toward NATO are extraordinary.

Timmermans' Trip to the United States, Dutch-U.S. Relations

16. (C/NF) Timmermans wants to make the 2009 celebration of American-Dutch relations a success. He is working to focus organizers during his meetings in New York November 16-18. He spoke earlier to New York Governor Spitzer about the events, and the governor was committed to the issue. Queen Beatrix has expressed interest in participating (Note: Please protect. Timmermans asked that the information about the Queen not be shared.).

17. (C) Timmermans also commented on Dutch-U.S. relations after the 2008 elections -- he does not expect much change. There are few differences among the campaigns on foreign policy. If the Democrats win the White House, they won't disengage from Iraq. If the Republicans win, they won't put any less effort into building relations with Europe.

18. (SBU) Timmermans thanked the ambassador for agreeing to help set up meetings for Timmermans' November 26-28 trip to Washington. He would like to meet with Energy Secretary Bodman, Under Secretaries Burns and Jeffrey, as well as senior National Security Council contacts and members of Congress.

COMMENT:

19. (C) Although his official portfolio covers European and Cultural Affairs, Timmermans is a major behind-the-scenes player within the Labor Party (PvdA) on foreign and defense policy issues generally, including the Uruzgan extension. Timmermans' support, while still in opposition, for sending Dutch troops to Uruzgan was one of the key factors convincing PvdA leader Wouter Bos to support the original deployment decision in 2005. Now that the issue of a new referendum on the EU reform treaty has been settled in the Balkenende government's favor, Timmermans appears to be focusing on European Energy policy as his next big project. His views on this subject will carry weight not only within the Netherlands, but also in EU circles where he is widely respected. End Comment.
Arnall